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REMARKS

Independent claims 1, 7 and 10 have been amended. It is submitted that the claims define an invention which is both novel and inventive with respect to the cited prior art. In particular, the process of the present invention makes it possible to produce a spunbond nonwoven fabric using a high level of reclaimed polypropylene, while maintaining the formation and product quality comparable to that which is obtained when using 100% virgin polymer. This is achieved in accordance with the process of the present invention by the combination of those steps as set forth in claims 1-10 as now presented. To further differentiate Applicant's process from the cited prior art, the claims now specify the content of the reclaimed polypropylene that is provided in the filaments. In particular, the claims specify that one polymer component of the filaments contains reclaimed polypropylene in an amount up to 100% by weight, and with the total amount of reclaimed polypropylene in the filaments being 25% by weight or greater. Independent claims 7 and 10 also recite this amount and further specify that the filaments are formed as sheath-core bicomponent filaments and that the reclaimed polypropylene is present in the core component.

As is pointed out in the Background of the Invention portion of Applicant's specification, pages 1 and 2, it is well known in the nonwovens industry to recycle polypropylene. However, the recycled polypropylene is not generally suitable for being used by itself in manufacture of spunbond nonwoven fabrics. Therefore, it is typically blended with virgin polypropylene. However, there is a limit to the amount recycled polypropylene that can be used. If too much recycled polypropylene is blended with the virgin resin, then an increase in the number of spinning breaks (broken filaments) will be seen. This causes quality defects in the finished spunbond nonwoven fabric or, in severe cases, a complete disruption of the manufacturing process. Additionally, too much recycled polypropylene can reduce the strength of the resulting nonwoven fabric. Applicant's specification goes on to note that for these reasons, the amount of polypropylene recycled back through the process has, in accordance with prior practices, been limited to less than about 20% of the total polypropylene by weight.

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The cited reference, Mleziva et al. WO 99/16947, describes a spunbond nonwoven fabric in which some recycled polypropylene is used. However, consistent with what is stated in Applicants' specification as noted above, this reference clearly teaches that the reclaimed polymer can be added only in an amount up to about 20% by weight. See page 19, lines 1-4.

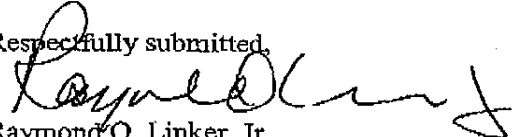
Clearly, therefore, Mleziva et al. does not teach how to produce a spunbond nonwoven fabric in which the filaments contain 25% by weight or greater reclaimed polypropylene. Therefore, the method defined in independent Claim 1 is clearly novel with respect to this reference. Furthermore, in view of the explicit teaching of this reference that 20% is the maximum amount of reclaim, Applicants' claimed invention is not suggested by or obvious from this reference. The dependent claims are also novel and non-obvious, owing to their dependency from Claim 1.

Independent Claims 7 and 10 are directed to a process for producing a spunbond nonwoven fabric which includes substantially continuous bicomponent filaments arranged to form a core component and a sheath component, and specify that the core component includes up to 100% by weight reclaimed polypropylene, with the total amount of reclaimed polypropylene in the filaments being 25% by weight or greater.

As noted above, Mleziva et al. do not teach or suggest a bicomponent filament with such a high concentration of reclaimed polypropylene, nor do they teach locating the recycle in the core component of a sheath core filament, or how to produce such filaments. Accordingly, Claims 7 and 10 and the claims dependent therefrom are novel and non-obvious.

In view of the claim amendments and the accompanying remarks, Applicant believes that this application now satisfies all applicable patentability requirements. Reconsideration by the Examiner and formal notification of the allowability of claims 1-10 are respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,


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